

Pac-12 Conference Football Media Days

Wednesday, July 26 2017

Larry Scott Pac-12 Commissioner



COMMISSIONER SCOTT: Thank you, Coach. You and your team are truly emblematic of the excellence that is in this conference, and it was amazing to hear the adversity that was overcome. Just one example of the amazing teams that have made up the five NCAA Championships in this conference. The University of Washington rowing team were part of a banner year for the Pac-12 overall. The milestone we celebrated this year is not only a chance to honor our past, but it's also a time to take stock of who we are as a conference.

In the Pac-12 and at our universities, our focus is on achieving excellence across the board. That means on the field, in courts, in the classroom, and beyond. No other conference exemplifies this excellence more than the Pac-12.

On the field, excellence means winning. And this past season, our universities, again, won more NCAA Championships than any other conference for the 12th year in a row. Our NCAA title count was 13 team championships this year, which was more than double any other conference. And this is only possible because the Pac-12 athletics programs are uniquely committed to all-around championship-level success and excellence in every sport.

The Pac-12 has claimed championships in 29 different sports and is leading the nation in the number of championships in 14 of those sports. Truly incredible.

Pac-12 excellence on the field also extended to Rio and the Olympics this past summer, where Pac-12 athletes and coaches were part of 55 total medals won in 12 different sports.

In fact, if the Pac-12 delegation of 277 Olympic athletes and coaches were considered a country, we would have finished fifth in the total medal count in Rio. Pretty amazing when you think about it from that perspective.

Our excellence was also on display on college sports biggest stages with the University of Washington making the College Football Playoff, Oregon in the Men's Final Four, Stanford in the Women's Final Four, Oregon State in the College World Series. Oregon, Washington, UCLA all in the Women's College World

Series.

On top of that, Pac-12 universities boasted the number one draft picks in the NBA, the WNBA, and the MLS drafts this year.

Now as impressive as our 501 NCAA Championships are, I find it more impressive that they were won by athletes who simultaneously are getting degrees from some of the best universities in the world. Stanford, for example, has won the Learfield Directors' Cup -- are you ready for this? -- 23 years in a row, all while consistently being ranked among the top universities in the world.

Our universities are also leading the way on improving the overall college experience for their student-athletes, taking steps to ensure that they can participate in the broad spectrum of campus life, including internships, travel abroad, and career development opportunities. We at the Pac-12 recently hosted the Pac-12 NFL Careers Forum to help 24 current Pac-12 football student-athletes gain a better understanding of the myriad career opportunities in the sports industry.

Increasingly, our member universities are developing robust programs with similar goals on each of our campuses. One great example is Oregon State's Everyday Champions program which gives Beaver student-athletes the opportunity to grow personally and professionally through mentorship programs, entrepreneurship programs, and networking events to prepare them to enter the workforce with poise and confidence after their collegiate playing days are over.

And at the Pac-12 Conference level, our global initiative is giving student-athletes the life-changing chance to not only travel abroad, as many of their non-student-athlete counterparts on campus are able to do, but also to participate in meaningful cultural and academic exchanges at the same time.

Earlier this summer, we helped fund Oregon women's soccer trip to China as well as Colorado and Oregon lacrosse teams' trips to Australia this past December.

These opportunities will continue this year with Stanford opening the football season against Rice in Australia and UCLA opening the men's basketball

regular season in Shanghai for the third ever Pac-12 China game.

Another way the Pac-12 works on helping its student-athletes succeed in life beyond college is through our Postgraduate Scholarship Program. This program awards scholarships to 24 outstanding student-athletes annually. This year alone we're awarding scholarships to student-athletes who are going to be able to head to Stanford's medical school. One is bound for Georgetown's law school. Another one is getting a master's degree in museum and exhibition studies, along with 21 other Pac-12 student-athletes that are highly qualified graduates that are going to go on to postgraduate work with our help.

I'm always impressed by the incredible things that our student-athletes are doing in college and beyond, and I hope you all get a chance to talk to our student-athletes that are here these next couple of days, not just about their on-field exploits in the season ahead, but about their off-field lives as well and the work their athletic departments are doing to help prepare them for success in life afterwards. You'll enjoy the conversation, and I think you'll get some great stories out of it as well.

Besides all the impressive things our universities and student-athletes are doing on their own, the Pac-12 is displaying excellence through collaboration through work our 12 campuses do together.

Many of you have written about the growing awareness of head trauma and other injuries in sports. Student-athlete health has become an important area in which we collaborate closely with our member universities, their researchers, and their medical schools. Some of the finest medical schools in the country are Pac-12 schools. Since 2013, our Student-Athlete Health and Well-Being Initiative has funded millions of dollars annually in research conducted on our campuses on issues related to student-athlete health.

Just last week you may have seen we announced the progress being made through the projects we're funding on things like cardiovascular screening, mental health, injury surveillance, thermal management, overuse injuries, and new concussion education materials. We also recently announced three new projects we'll be funding in the areas of traumatic brain injury, stress fractures, and return-to-play decisions.

On top of that, this year we co-hosted a national conference on sport-related concussion with the NCAA just across town at UCLA. This conference brought together leading doctors and researchers from around the nation to discuss the largest concussion study of all time, which we had a chance to participate in.

Another example of our collective elements of excellence brings us back to football. This year we're unveiling a new centralized replay officiating command center at the Conference office in San Francisco. For the 2017 season, we'll be expanding our centralized football replay model to include all 12 schools, after working with Oregon and Cal last year as experimental host sites for this technology during the 2016 season.

The Pac-12 centralized replay command center is going to assist with in-game replay officiating and decision-making. Our team in the command center will work in concert with our in-stadium replay officials to manage the replay process for all Pac-12 home-hosted games. We expect this is going to lead to even more consistency in replay reviews.

A final area in which we're showing collective leadership is around the issue of the length of football games. We know fans are feeling the impact of longer games. We support the ongoing work of rules committees that are working nationally to examine this issue and look at possible rule changes that affect the pace of the game and the length of the game.

But we also wanted to see what we could do in our conference to advance these efforts. So this fall, on Pac-12 Networks games, during the non-conference season, we're going to be piloting a shorter format for our football games which includes fewer commercial breaks and a reduced halftime, from 20 minutes to 15 minutes, and implementing some other production techniques aimed at reducing the TV timeouts and having shorter breaks.

We've worked with our universities on these proposed modifications, and over the next few weeks we'll be finalizing exactly which games during the non-conference season will be piloted.

So that's a look at some of our elements of excellence, that I see across our conference. As we look to the football season, I am confident we're going to see similar excellence and a winning trend that will continue on the national stage. The trajectory of Pac-12 football is incredible, and we bring back incredible experience on both sides of the ball, with All-Pac-12 returning starters on every team.

This is certainly true for two of our hottest teams at the end of last season -- Washington, which made a great run for the College Football Playoff, and USC, a team that won its last eight regular season games and pulled out a thrilling Rose Bowl victory against Penn State. Both the Huskies and the Trojans appear to be loaded again this season and ready to continue their winning ways.

Deservedly there is great interest around quarterbacks in this league. The quarterback play in this conference is competitive. We've got a lot of star returning quarterbacks, and I expect competitive offensive battles throughout the season, through this incredible and very impressive corps of quarterbacks we've got returning to lead their teams. Our eventual Pac-12 champion this season is going to be tested like no other, with a nine-game conference schedule, a competitive non-conference schedule that pits Pac-12 teams against representatives from all four of our peer conferences, and ultimately our Pac-12 Football Championship game.

Speaking of our Pac-12 Football Championship game, I'm excited to announce today an extension of our relationship with Levi Stadium in Santa Clara through 2019, with an option for 2020. We're fortunate to have found a great home for our marquee game in Levi Stadium, a state-of-the-art facility located in the heart of Silicon Valley, and we appreciate the great partnership that we've formed with the 49ers, Levi Stadium, and the City of Santa Clara.

Levi Stadium offers a big-time atmosphere and incredible venue for our most important game of the year. Our student-athletes love it, and it's been great to see the entire country focus on the Pac-12 as our teams vie for the College Football Playoff and Rose Bowl berths and opportunities beyond that.

In the lead-up to the championship game, we're excited that our media partners will once again offer comprehensive coverage of Pac-12 football all season long.

There are 44 games that will be telecast by ESPN and Fox combined nationally, and Pac-12 Networks will once again be telecasting 35 football games this season, including wall-to-wall coverage of Week 1 where we've got seven games on the Pac-12 Networks over a three-day period.

This August will mark the five-year anniversary of the Pac-12 Network's launch. As we move into the sixth football season on the air, Pac-12 Networks continues to offer the most comprehensive coverage for Pac-12 fans. Pac-12 Networks is returning a team of seasoned analysts, some of whom I hope you're going to get a chance to speak to over the next few days, and a lineup of football programming that will take fans behind the scenes, into the Xs and Os, beyond anything that we've done before.

We're expanding the reach of Pac-12 Networks, not just with more distribution agreements, but across digital and social platforms.

On top of sharing a platform for all of our 12 universities' official athletics websites, we're seamlessly distributing video content through our network with YouTube, and we feature a new pilot that we're doing with Facebook called Crossposting. So we're fully taking advantage of our relationships with the tech leaders on the West Coast.

Through this unique collaboration with our 12 schools and our university social channels, we saw a grand total of 400 million social engagements across all these channels last season.

So as I wrap up this morning, I want to return to what drives us in the Pac-12. There are so many different elements of excellence across our conference, from our undisputed dominance across all sports to having some of the best universities in the world, to our innovative collaboration in areas like student-athlete health. We are winning more than any other conference, both on the field and courts and off, and that's what truly matters to our schools.

So thank you for being here, and I'm happy to take a few questions for you this morning. Thank you.

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and take questions for the commissioner. So if you have any questions for the commissioner, please raise your hand.

Q. Is there any talk about an over-the-top digital platform for the Pac-12 Network at all?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: We spent a lot of time thinking about that. The media world is changing rapidly before our eyes. One of the great advantages of the Pac-12 is certainly our West Coast location, our relationship with all these tech companies. Notably, our networks are located in San Francisco, the heart of Silicon Valley. There is a lot of alumni from our schools that are leaders of a lot of these companies that are innovating ways to distribute content.

And if you twin all of that with the fact that we're the only collegiate network that owns and controls its own content, over time we're going to have a unique flexibility and ability to be nimble and experiment and pilot as these new forms of distribution occur.

Today -- well, over the last year, I should say, we struck our first deals with the Pac-12 Networks with over-the-top distributors. So you may have read over the last year deals entered into with Sling TV, which is owned by Dish, that offer fans anywhere in the country the ability to sign up regardless of who their cable or satellite operator may be. Anyone can get it and get the Pac-12 Networks on any mobile device.

This past week we announced our second over-the-top distribution deal with CenturyLink. That offers a similar service, where no matter where you are in the country you can sign up for a suite of channels and get the Pac-12 Networks.

Beyond that -- and that's about distribution of the Pac-12 Networks. When you talk about digital beyond that, we've got a lot of other events that take place across sports at our 12 schools, and we were the first collegiate conference last year to experiment with Twitter, and we created a product called Pac-12 Plus. It was distributed for free on Twitter. We had over 50 events that were distributed, working in collaboration with our schools. So that was an early experiment where -- a good example of us being a first mover.

I think you'll see this year an expansion of that and partnerships -- expanding partnerships, not just with the Twitters of the world, but Facebook and many others. So we are very well placed, not only geographically, but in terms of how we've organized our rights and the control that we have to take advantage of these new opportunities as they arrive.

Q. (Off microphone)?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: Is that the one that was reported on yesterday?

Q. That's the one that was reported yesterday, yes.

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: So I did have a chance to review that report, and it is a significant concern for all of us involved in college sports, the issue of brain trauma, traumatic injury. It's something we've committed ourselves to as a conference, to engage in and to leverage the expertise of Pac-12 researchers, medical schools, the outstanding doctors and trainers we have. We're going to leverage our expertise to contribute to the research in this area.

So a few years ago we created a Student-Athlete Health and Well-Being Initiative, where we're funding it with over \$3.5 million every year to do collective research. And one of the areas of emphasis is head trauma. So we've got a Head Trauma Task Force of medical leaders, researchers, experts that are contributing to it. We've started our own research working closely with the NCAA to create a database and analyze issues of brain trauma and other injuries when they arise.

As I mentioned in my remarks, working with UCLA and the NCAA, we held the first-ever concussion conference here in the Conference in January. We brought together not just people in sports, but members of the Department of Defense, NCAA, leaders from all around the country to participate.

Obviously, there are a lot of efforts going on throughout the country, but we made a determination a few years ago that the Pac-12 has an ability to really be a leader in this space, and we've committed ourselves to work on it.

What we learned from the research will not only contribute to the good work being done all over the country, but it's also informing policy decisions we might make. So over the last few years you may have followed that we've changed some rules about contact for football players during the off-season. And we have regular sessions with our coaches that are grounded in some of this research that informs the training techniques, some of the rules that we've got, not just within our own conference but nationally.

So we're learning a lot, but we're emphasizing it as a higher priority.

Q. Could you expand a little bit more on the attempt to shorten the games, which games those are going to be, what precipitated that with the halftime being shortened, what was the reaction and feedback you were getting from the coaches?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: Yeah, so college football has never been more popular, as measured by attendance, ratings, but I certainly subscribe to the philosophy that you've always got to be looking ahead and never be complacent. And just because metrics show robust ratings and attendance doesn't mean we shouldn't be experimenting and piloting with formats that will keep the sport attractive. Not just myself, but others certainly believe that with the combination of the incredible experience viewing football on TV now, the many other choices people have with their time and just changing tastes, it's incumbent upon us to look at the presentation of the sport and make sure the pace of play is moving as much as possible, and without changing the fundamentals of the game, we look to make the presentation as tight as possible.

This is also not just anecdotal observation, we study a lot of research, we talk to a lot of our partners at ESPN, Fox, and the Pac-12 Networks about it. Over the last year I've learned through research ESPN and the Pac-12 Networks has done that you could lose as much as 30 percent of a TV audience at halftime; that there are examples where it depends on the game and what's going on, but you're at a risk of people tuning out with a long halftime. As I talk to our athletics directors, even in terms of the in-game experience, it's a break, it's a long break.

We also hear concerns about the amount of TV timeouts and breaks. So even though the popularity is incredible right now, we are trying to be progressive and experiment with ways to manage the game

presentation through reduction of the TV timeouts and some of the 30-second commercial spots.

There are new creative ways to do some on-screen branding and advertising. I don't know if anyone watched the British Open this weekend on NBC. You would have seen some new ways of some split screens instead of them breaking away from the action. So we're going to be on the forefront of experimenting with some of those techniques to eliminate the amount of minutes you've got to go away from the game and stop the game, number one. And, number two, we very much salute and support some of the halftime rituals and presentations and of course the break for the student-athletes, but when I talked to our coaches about this, I really started this by talking to our coaches about halftime, from a student-athlete health perspective and welfare perspective, and I was delighted to hear our coaches feel like 20 minutes is more than they need from a student-athlete health and rest and an Xs and Os perspective. Some even believed that 20 minutes may be too long in terms of keeping the muscles loose and all that.

That led me to want to push our conference to pilot with this shortened format. It's a step. We'll test it during the non-conference season. We'll get some good feedback. I'm sure there are other tests going on in other conferences. And let me underscore, this is a comprehensive look at the presentation of the game that we have to bring to it, which includes looking at the rules. There are some things that happen in college sports that lengthen our football games that don't happen in, for example, the NFL. Notably the clock stoppages that happen, incomplete passes, first downs that slow our game down. So our average game length in the Pac-12 was almost three and a half hours over the last few years. I think you'll find that NFL games are closer to three hours.

So I think there are things we can do through possible rules changes, the presentation of our game, game management, dealing with commercial inventory that could bring us closer to three hours than three and a half hours, and over time I think that will be a good thing for our fans.

Q. A lot of our fans and some of the athletes have also talked about the late game times and the East Coast bias. And Pac-12 After Dark is fantastic for the West Coast, but the East Coast media don't see it, so I don't hear a lot of national media talking about the Pac-12 players a lot. People are concerned about rankings and seeding and stuff. So what are you doing? Do you believe there is an East Coast bias, and do you have any plans to help out with that?

COMMISSIONER SCOTT: Yeah, I'll try to unpack all of the elements of that question. Yeah, I try not to focus on the East Coast bias. I try to look at our West Coast advantages. We can't change the time zones in the country, so that's always been present, and we don't spend a lot of time worrying about that.

What we've discovered with our media partners is our ability to play more night games has created value. It's created value for our media partners that's gone back to our schools in the form of exclusive and prominent national windows. And while it's absolutely true that when we play night games, and about a third of our Saturday games are at night -- I want to make that clear. There's a perception that all of our games are at night, two-thirds of them are what you would consider during day. But of the third of our games that are at night, while there is less East Coast viewership, we dominate it. We've got the most market share.

While somewhat counterintuitive, the research actually shows some of our best-rated games are 7 p.m., 7:30 p.m. kickoff times. If it's a compelling game, there are a lot of fans still watching TV, and we dominate the market share at that hour. Oftentimes more eyeballs than if we've got a game kicking off at 12:30 or 1:00 up against 15 other games on all the myriad of media channels that exist.

So it's a balancing act, but we've clearly unlocked value by migrating, by agreeing to migrate more games to the evening. And I understand there are tradeoffs and it creates challenges in terms of some of our fans that want to attend games. Games end late at night. So we make sure there is a good spread of events. Again, two-thirds during the day, about a third at night. But even though it doesn't seem intuitive, the night games actually rate quite well for us.